

No Seat at the Table: Safeguarding Public Health from Tobacco Industry Interference in the DRC

Executive Summary

Tobacco industry interference remains a major barrier to effective tobacco control in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Recent assessments highlight systematic lobbying, misleading corporate social responsibility initiatives, opaque government–industry interactions, and weak conflict-of-interest safeguards, all of which have delayed and weakened evidence-based tobacco control measures despite clear public health harms. The DRC’s incomplete implementation of **Article 5.3 of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC)** and limited enforcement of **Article 113 of Framework Act n°18/035** continue to expose public policy to commercial interests. This brief draws on emerging evidence to expose these tactics and underscores the urgent need to fully implement legal and institutional protections to safeguard public health decision-making.

DRC’s Performance in the Industry Interference Index

According to the 2025 Global Tobacco Industry Interference Index, the DRC ranked **76th out of 100 countries** with a **score of 72**, indicating a high level of tobacco industry interference in public policy. Though it is the country’s first appearance on the index, this ranking reflects weak transparency, sustained industry access to policymakers, and limited safeguards against conflicts of interest. The DRC does not fully implement Article 5.3 of the WHO FCTC, leaving tobacco control policies vulnerable to commercial influence and undermining effective regulation.

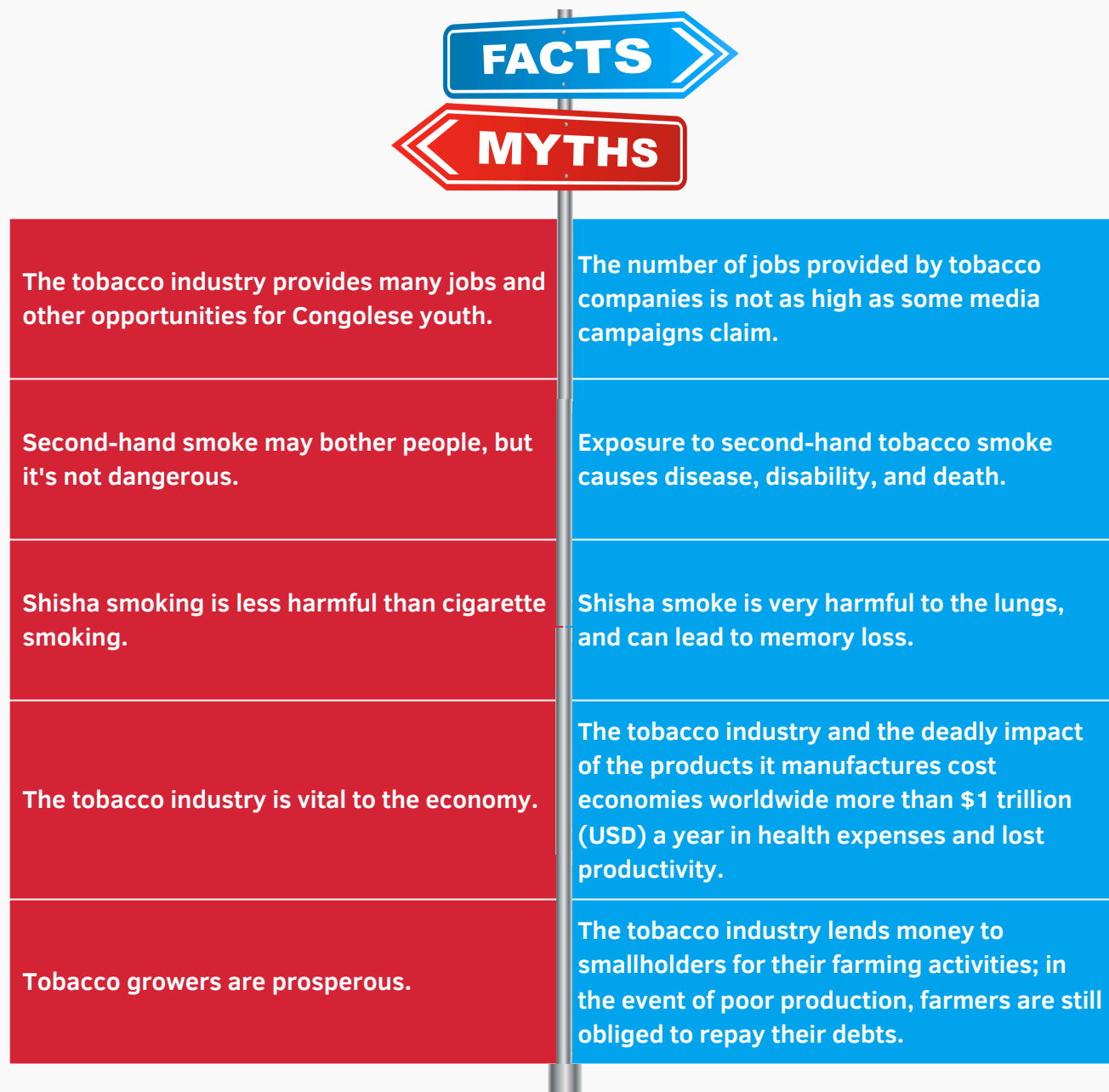
Tactics Used by the Tobacco Industry in the DRC

- **Documented lobbying and policy access** used to influence or delay tobacco control legislation.
- **Expanded use of corporate social responsibility (CSR)** as a **policy-access and reputation-building tool**, despite FCTC guidance.
- **Preferential fiscal and regulatory treatment** (e.g., tax reliefs or leniency) undermines equity and enforcement.
- **Repeated non-essential interactions between officials and the tobacco industry persist.**
- **Absence of mandatory disclosure rules** enables opaque government–industry relationships.
- **No explicit Article 5.3 safeguards in the code of ethics**, sustaining conflicts of interest.





Tobacco Industry Facts and Myths



Policy Options/Scenarios

To effectively safeguard public health from Tobacco Industry Interference in the DRC, policymakers can consider several strategic pathways that differ in ambition, cost, and implementation complexity.





Option	Description	Advantages	Disadvantages	Impact
Option 1 – Maintain the Status Quo	Continue without formal adoption of Article 5.3 provisions.	No immediate political or administrative disruption.	Ongoing interference, weak enforcement, and reputational risk for public institutions.	Low – maintains industry influence.
Option 2 – Partial Adoption of Transparency Measures	Introduce internal guidelines for selected ministries.	Incremental improvement in accountability.	Limited coverage; not legally binding.	Moderate – modest protection for select sectors.
Option 3 – Full Adoption and Enforcement of Article 5.3	Formally adopt and apply Article 5.3 of the WHO FCTC and Article 113 of the DRC’s Framework Act on Public Health.	Legally protects public policy from interference; strengthens institutional integrity.	Requires legal amendments, training, and monitoring.	High – sustainable, system-wide reform.
Option 4 – Establish a National Oversight Mechanism	Create a multi-sectoral committee to oversee and report on interactions with the industry.	Enhances transparency and coordination.	Needs sustained political will and funding.	High and Sustainable – institutionalizes integrity across government.

Policy Recommendations

- **Formal adoption and implementation of Article 5.3** of the WHO FCTC by the Congolese government. This creates a legal obligation for all government branches to avoid collaboration with the tobacco industry.
- It should be made compulsory by the Congolese government, that **any necessary meeting with the tobacco industry is conducted in public**, with a clear agenda, and that minutes are publicly disclosed.
- **Build capacity and awareness** by conducting training sessions for parliamentarians, civil servants, and the media on the tactics of tobacco industry interference and the provisions of Article 5.3.
- **Establish strong sanctions for all government institutions and public officials who accept any form of direct or indirect contribution**, including CSR initiatives, from the tobacco industry or its affiliates.





For references and more information on tobacco industry interference in the DRC, visit:

<https://drc.tobaccocontroldata.org/en/home/interference-de-lindustrie/>



Adult Prevalence

Information on current adult prevalence of tobacco consumption by product, gender, age, rural/urban area, level of education, socio-economic status and province.

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Youth Prevalence

Presentation of primary research results about adolescent tobacco and nicotine use in DRC.

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Legislation

An overview of the country's smoke-free legislation, its history, application and future prospects.

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Taxation

The share of taxes and the structure of cigarette taxes in the DRC compared with other countries, as well as their evolution over time.

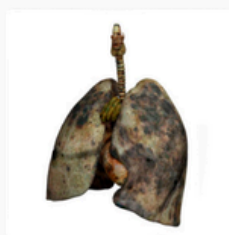
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Industry Interference

Information on the structure of the tobacco market and recommendations for tobacco industry interference in the DRC.

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Morbidity

The health consequences of smoking for smokers and those around them.

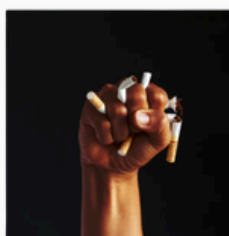
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Illicit Trade

Qualitative and quantitative data on the illicit cigarette market in the DRC. This page describes the origins and types of illicit cigarettes sold in the DRC, as well as the importance of illicit products on the national market.

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Prevention and awareness

This page highlights actionable pathways for the DRC to reduce tobacco and nicotine use and exposure across the population, starting well before initiation.

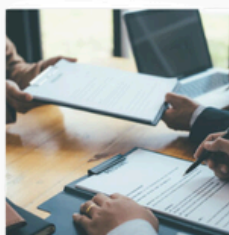
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New and emerging products

This page examines the prevalence, health effects, and marketing strategies of NENTPs in the DRC. It also provides insights into their impact on public health, regulatory policies, and consumer trends.

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WHO FCTC

This page is designed to equip decision-makers with the essential knowledge and policy tools needed to take effective action against tobacco use, in alignment with the WHO FCTC guidelines.

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